

Protecting theatres for everyone



Ref.: TC/609

30 September 2020

Mr. P. Burrige
Planning Services
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St Stephen's Road
Bournemouth
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By e-mail: planning.bournemouth@bcpcouncil.gov.uk

Application: 7-2020-1685-M

Site: 27-28 Westover Road, Bournemouth, BH1 2BZ

Proposal: Approval in principle: development and re-development to allow for the construction of 1,100 m² commercial floor space at lower and mid ground levels comprising five units for use within either Class A1 (retail), A3 (restaurant), D1 (non-residential institution) or D2 (assembly & leisure); 67 apartments, 48 car parking spaces, associated servicing facilities, refuse and cycle storage

Remit:

The Theatres Trust is the national advisory public body for theatres. We were established through the Theatres Trust Act 1976 'to promote the better protection of theatres' and provide statutory planning advice on theatre buildings and theatre use in England through The Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015, requiring the Trust to be consulted by local authorities on planning applications which include 'development involving any land on which there is a theatre'.

Comment:

Thank you for consulting Theatres Trust regarding this application for a mixed-use development at the former ABC on Westover Road.

A previous outline proposal for this site was submitted in 2017, to which the Trust objected on the basis of a failure to market the site for continued cultural or community use and/or demonstrate such use is no longer required. The application was refused for a number of reasons in October of that year. This proposal has been substantially revised, including a greater degree of façade retention to the Westover Road and Hinton Road elevations. It will also provide a greater quantum of town centre commercial floorspace and units.

The ABC opened in 1937 and formed part of a cluster of cinemas and theatres around Westover Road and Hinton Road including the Pavilion, the former Regent Theatre/Odeon and the

Theatres Trust

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Chair Tim Eyles **Director** Jon Morgan

Trustees Richard Baldwin, David Blyth, Pam Bone, Paul Cartwright, Paddy Dillon, Annie Hampson, Richard Johnston, Gary Kemp, Simon Ricketts, Jane Spiers, Truda Spruyt, Katie Town

The National Advisory Public Body for Theatres

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Playhouse/Palace Court Theatre. It was designed in an Art Deco style and had a capacity of over 2,500. Although it was built with stage facilities, we understand that it saw little live performance use. In the late 1960s it was substantially altered for sub-division into two screens. Although it passed between various names due to acquisitions of its operator, it remained active until closure by the Odeon in 2017.

The original Art Deco frontage was over-clad in the 1969 works but is believed to remain in place. The applicant is proposing reinstatement which is to be welcomed, although this would be subject to further exploration. The Hinton Road brick facade would be retained with alteration to insert openings facilitating residential use; although typically utilitarian as is common and necessary in cinema and theatre design the brickwork is nonetheless patterned and carefully detailed and would have been carefully considered by the original architect. This elevation contributes strongly to the building's significance as a non-designated heritage asset and is a recognisable reminder of its original function as a place of entertainment. Again we are supportive of the revised approach. A modern upwards extension would be stepped back so it has a greater degree of subservience to the original building than the previous proposal. In design terms we consider this scheme to represent a significant improvement on the previous proposal.

We understand there to be a substantial quantum of original features and fabric to remain internally including the proscenium. We would suggest that if this proposal is approved a condition should be in place requiring submission of a detailed and photographic recording report for the benefit of future generations.

However, in common with the previous application there is no demonstration that the building is surplus to requirements for continued community or cultural use. The applicant's Planning Statement states without objective substantiation, "there is no reasonable prospect of the use continuing" on the basis of the Odeon relocating. However this ignores a growing trend for cinemas with more premium offers and also smaller arthouse or independent operators; there are numerous towns and cities around the UK many of which are smaller than Bournemouth which support more than one cinema. It was previously noted to be the case the former operator inserted a restrictive covenant preventing future cinema use but this is not a consideration for planning purposes. Neither is there evidence alternative cultural or community use has been explored. The proposal would therefore be in conflict with Policy CS29 of the Bournemouth Local Plan: Core Strategy (2012) which resists the loss of such sites unless it can be demonstrated the use is not viable, there is no prospect of it continuing and it has been actively marketed at an appropriate value for a period of twelve months. This is further supported by Policy U8 of the Bournemouth Local Plan: Town Centre Area Action Plan (2013). Without evidence neither would it accord with paragraph 92 of the NPPF (2019) which seeks decisions to plan positively for the provision of community facilities including cultural buildings and to guard against unnecessary loss.

Therefore, in conclusion, whilst we broadly welcome and support the proposed design approach

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compared to the previous scheme this is on the assumption that the applicant is able to demonstrate lack of need for continued cultural or community use in line with local and national policy. Without such evidence we are currently unable to support the granting of outline planning permission.

Please do not hesitate to contact us should you wish to discuss these comments in greater detail.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "T Clarke". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Tom Clarke MRTPI
National Planning Adviser

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